

## Message Text

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ACTION OES-07

INFO OCT-01 ARA-10 ISO-00 SS-15 AID-05 AGRE-00 EB-08  
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R 241910Z MAY 78  
FM AMEMBASSY TEGUCIGALPA  
TO SECSTATE WASHDC 462

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 1 OF 3 TEGUCIGALPA 2470

FOR: SECRETARY VANCE AND ADMINISTRATOR GILLIGAN FROM AMBASSADOR  
JARAMILLO

E.O. 11652: GDS  
TAGS: SPOP, HO  
SUBJ: CONVERSATION WITH THE CHIEF OF STATE: POPULATION GROWTH  
AND FOOD PRODUCTION

REF: STATE 107370

1. SUMMARY: AS INSTRUCTED, I CALLED ON CHIEF OF STATE MELGAR MAY 22 TO DISCUSS THE PROBLEMS OF POPULATION GROWTH AND FOOD PRODUCTION. I FOUND MELGAR INTERESTED AND INFORMED ON BOTH PROBLEMS, AND RECEPTIVE TO IDEAS I EXPRESSED. HE EMPHASIZED THE EXTREME SENSITIVITY OF THE POPULATION CONTROL ISSUE IN HONDURAS, AND VIGOROUS CAMPAIGN OF CATHOLIC CHURCH TO OPPOSE IT. FOR THESE REASONS, MELGAR SAID, GOVERNMENT HAD TO BE VERY DISCREET EVEN ABOUT MEASURES IT HAS ALREADY TAKEN. I WAS IMPRESSED WITH THE OBVIOUS INTEREST AND KNOWLEDGE OF THE CHIEF OF STATE ON THIS SUBJECT, AND WITH THE DETERMINATION OF HIS GOVERNMENT TO DO WHAT IT FEELS IT IS ABLE TO DO QUIETLY, WITHOUT PUBLICITY, GIVEN THE EXPLOSIVE POLITICAL POTENTIAL OF THIS PROBLEM IN HONDURAS. END SUMMARY.

2. ACCOMPANIED BY THE DCM, I CALLED ON THE CHIEF OF STATE, BRIGADIER GENERAL JUAN ALBERTO MELGAR CASTRO, ON MAY 22 TO  
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DISCUSS THE PROBLEMS OF POPULATION GROWTH AND FOOD PRODUCTION, AS INSTRUCTED. I TOLD HIM OF OUR CONCERN THAT THE MOST PRESSING DEVELOPMENT ISSUE IS TO BRING POPULATION AND RESOURCES INTO SOME REASONABLE BALANCE, USING THE REFERENCED MESSAGE AS THE BASIS OF MY INITIAL PRESENTATION. IN A REAL SENSE, I SAID, ALL OTHER DEVELOPMENT PROBLEMS ARE SUPPLEMENTARY TO PROBLEMS RAISED BY THIS BASIC ISSUE.

3. I REMARKED, AND GENERAL MELGAR AGREED, THAT THE FIVE-YEAR PLAN (1979-1983) OFFERS AND OPPORTUNITY TO BUILD IN CERTAIN IDEAS TO ASSIST IN REDUCING THE POPULATION GROWTH AND INCREASING FOOD PRODUCTION, AND SUGGESTED THAT STEPS BE TAKEN TO INITIATE NEW OR STRENGTHEN EXISTING PROGRAMS IN THESE TWO AREAS. I ASKED WHETHER OUR AID PROGRAM HAD BEEN AS HELPFUL TO THE GOVERNMENT IN THESE RESPECTS AS IT COULD BE. HIS COMMENTS ABOUT THE AID ROLE WERE POSITIVE AND ENCOURAGING. I ASSURED THE CHIEF OF STATE THAT: (1) THE US WILL SUPPORT INCREASED MEASURE DIRECTLY - IF THAT IS DESIRED - OR INDIRECTLY THE FLOW OF RESOURCES AND TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE FOR POPULATION PROGRAMS, AND (2) THE US WILL CONTINUE AND EXPAND SUPPORT FOR AGRICULTURAL PROGRAMS, MOST PARTICULARLY TOWARD BENEFITTING THE RURAL POOR. I EXPRESSED OUR SATISFACTION WITH THE CLOSE WORKING RELATIONSHIP OF OUR AID MISSION WITH AGENCIES IN THE AGRICULTURAL SECTOR AND WITH THE DEVELOPING RELATIONSHIP WITH THE PUBLIC HEALTH MINISTRY.

4. AS USUAL, THE CHIEF OF STATE WAS GRACIOUS, RELAXED, FRANK AND RECEPTIVE. AT THE OUTSET OF MY CALL, KNOWING THAT I WAS IMPINGING ON THE PERIOD HE USUALLY SPENDS WITH THE CABINET, I ASKED HIM HOW MUCH TIME I COULD HAVE, AND HE RESPONDED, "AS MUCH AS YOU NEED." AS WE GOT INTO THE DISCUSSION, IT BECAME CLEAR THAT ALTHOUGH HE HAS GIVEN MORE OBVIOUS ATTENTION TO DEVELOPMENTS IN THE AGRICULTURAL SECTOR, HE HAS ALSO BEEN

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VERY MUCH CONCERNED, ON BOTH AN OFFICIAL AND A PERSONAL LEVEL, WITH THE HEALTH SECTOR, INCLUDING POPULATION. INsofar AS POPULATION PROBLEMS ARE CONCERNED, HOWEVER, BECAUSE THIS IS A LATIN, CATHOLIC COUNTRY, HE EMPHASIZED AGAIN AND AGAIN THAT HE HAS HAD TO BE EXTREMELY CIRCUMSPECT. HE SAID THAT THE CHURCH IS A VERY POWERFUL POLITICAL INFLUENCE IN THIS COUNTRY, AND IS MOST ALERT AND SENSITIVE TO ANY MOVES TO CONTROL THE POPULATION. HE TERMED ARCHBISHOP SANTOS A "DEALER IN RUMORS," STATING THAT HE FREQUENTLY RUSHES TO THE CHIEF OF STATE TO ASK ABOUT THE LATEST RUMOR THAT THE GOVERNMENT PLANS TO IMPOSE BIRTH CONTROLS OF ONE KIND OR ANOTHER. FACED WITH THIS HOSTILE AND SUSPICIOUS ATTITUDE, MELGAR SAID, HIS GOVERNMENT MUST BE EXTREMELY CAUTIOUS AND DISCREET IN ITS APPROACH TO THE POPULATION PROBLEM. IF WHAT THE GOVERNMENT IS QUIETLY DOING TO FOSTER BIRTH CONTROL WERE TO BECOME PUBLIC KNOWLEDGE, HE SAID, IT WOULD BE DENOUNCED IN EVERY PULPIT IN THE COUNTRY, CAUSING SUCH A BACKLASH THAT THE GOVERNMENT WOULD HAVE TO ABANDON ALL THE GAINS THAT HAVE BEEN MADE SO DISCREETLY THUS FAR. NONETHELESS, ON VARIOUS OCCASIONS THE SUPERIOR PLANNING COUNCIL HAD DISCUSSED POPULATION CONTROL, WITH PARTICULAR REFERENCE TO PROJECTIONS FOR THE YEAR 2000.

5. ALTHOUGH I SENSE THAT THERE IS A RELUCTANCE IN THIS PRE-SUMABLY PREELECTION PERIOD TO TAKE ON ADDITIONAL POLITICAL ISSUES REGARDED AS POSTPONABLE, I WAS IMPRESSED BY GENERAL MELGAR'S AWARENESS OF THE SERIOUSNESS OF THE POPULATION PROBLEM, AND THE NEED TO ACT TO COMBAT IT. PROGRESS ATTAINED TO DATE IN ESTABLISHING A POPULATION PROGRAM IS BY NO MEANS SATISFACTORY, EVEN THOUGH IN THE LONG RUN (BY THE YEAR 2000) THE NEED TO REDUCE POPULATION GROWTH RATES IS ACCEPTED. (THE MINISTER OF HEALTH HAD PREVIOUSLY TOLD US HONDURAS NEEDED TO BE AT A ZERO BASE BY THE YEAR 2000. HE ALSO BELIEVES THAT THE ANNUAL GROWTH RATE HAS ALREADY DROPPED TO 3.2 PERCENT.) NONE-THELESS, THE GOVERNMENT HAS DONE MORE THAN IS COMMONLY KNOWN, MELGAR SAID, CITING AS ONE EXAMPLE THE FACT THAT HOSPITALS HAVE BEEN EQUIPPED WITH FACILITIES NECESSARY TO PERFORM ABOR-  
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TIONS. MELGAR ALSO TOLD ME THAT THE VARIOUS MINISTRIES, INCLUDING HEALTH, EDUCATION AND NATIONAL PLANNING, ARE WORKING

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TO SECSTATE WASHDC 463

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 2 OF 3 TEGUCIGALPA 2470

FOR: SECRETARY VANCE AND ADMINISTRATOR GILLIGAN FROM AMBASSADOR  
JARAMILLO

TOGETHER TO DEVELOP A MORE DETAILED ANALYSIS OF THE POPULATION PROBLEM, IN THE REALIZATION THAT IF SOMETHING IS NOT DONE TO CONTROL THE POPULATION GROWTH, HONDURAS WILL HAVE "TERRIBLE PROBLEMS" IN FUTURE YEARS. I REMARKED THAT AN IRONY IN THE SITUATION IS THAT WHILE THE US ADVOCATES A STRONG POPULATION CONTROL PROGRAM, I HAVE HEARD THAT THE "LEFTISTS" IN HONDURAS

OPPOSE IT; AND THIS MEANS THAT THEY ARE ON THE SAME SIDE OF THE ISSUE AS THE CATHOLIC CHURCH. IN RESPONSE TO MY QUESTION AS TO WHETHER THE EXTREME LEFT IS STRONG ENOUGH TO BLOCK A POPULATION CONTROL PROGRAM IN HONDURAS, MELGAR SAID THE LEFTISTS ARE VERY WEAK. MELGAR TOLD ME THERE IS A SERIES OF PENDING PROJECTS IN WHICH HE HAS TAKEN CONSIDERABLE INTEREST, INCLUDING MEASURES TO ALLEVIATE THE PROBLEMS CAUSED BY THE LARGE NUMBER OF CHILDREN BORN TO UNWED MOTHERS. IN MANY INSTANCES CHILDREN IN SUCH CIRCUMSTANCES HAVE BEEN ABANDONED, MELGAR SAID, AND THIS IS A SERIOUS PROBLEM. HE SAID THE HONDURAS WOMEN'S ASSOCIATION IS COOPERATING WITH THE GOVERNMENT IN ITS EFFORTS TO ALLEVIATE THE PROBLEM. HE IS WORKING ON A LAW CALLED "RESPONSIBLE PARENTHOOD."

6. THE CHIEF OF STATE ASSURED ME THAT HE SHARES THE CONCERNS I EXPRESSED. HE INDICATED THAT THE MINISTER OF HEALTH IS CONVINCED OF THE IMPORTANCE OF REDUCING POPULATION GROWTH AND THAT

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MINISTRY FACILITIES ARE OFFERING NEEDED SERVICES TO THOSE WHO DESIRE THEM - MORE SO THAN IN THE PAST. HE AGAIN POINTED OUT THAT HONDURAS IS A CATHOLIC COUNTRY AND THAT THE INSTITUTIONAL VIEWPOINT, LED BY THE ARCHBISHOP, IS ADAMANTLY AGAINST FAMILY PLANNING AS PRACTICED IN MANY COUNTRIES. IN RESPONSE TO MY QUESTION OF WHETHER THE GOVERNMENT WILL TAKE A MORE EXPLICIT PUBLIC STAND FAVORING REDUCED BIRTH RATES, MELGAR SAID HIS GOVERNMENT COULD NOT CONSIDER ISSUING ANY PUBLIC POLICY STATEMENT, ALTHOUGH HE CONCEDED THAT SOMETHING MORE EXPLICIT AND POSITIVE MIGHT BE INCLUDED IN THE UPCOMING FIVE-YEAR PLAN DOCUMENT. HE SAID MORE EDUCATION, UNDERSTANDING AND ACCEPTANCE BY THE PEOPLE WOULD BE REQUIRED BEFORE THE GOVERNMENT COULD TAKE A MORE ACTIVE PUBLIC POSITION. AS A MATTER OF FACT, MELGAR SAID, THE EDUCATED PEOPLE OF HONDURAS, WHETHER OR NOT THEY ARE CATHOLICS, ARE ALREADY PRACTICING BIRTH CONTROL. I RESPONDED THAT EDUCATION AND BIRTH CONTROL GO HAND-IN-HAND, AND ASKED IF THERE ARE ANY PLANS FOR EXCHANGING IDEAS AMONG VARIOUS MINISTRIES, INCLUDING EDUCATION, TO DEVELOP A MORE COORDINATED PLAN ALONG THESE LINES. MELGAR SEEMED TO THINK WELL OF THIS SUGGESTION, MADE NOT OF IT, AND SAID HE WILL CONVENE A MEETING OF ALL MINISTERS HAVING ANYTHING TO DO WITH POPULATION CONTROL.

7. PLAYING ON THE RATHER TIGHT BUDGETARY SITUATION OF THE GOH, I TALKED ABOUT THE COST SAVINGS WHICH COULD OCCUR AND ACCRUE IF THE ANNUAL POPULATION GROWTH COULD BE DROPPED, E.G., FROM 3.5 TO 2.5 PERCENT, DURING THE NEXT FIVE-YEAR PLAN PERIOD. THE STATISTICAL RESULTS OVER A 20-YEAR PERIOD IN TERMS OF SAVINGS IN GOVERNMENTAL SERVICES FOR EDUCATION, FOOD, HEALTH AND SHELTER IS DRAMATIC. SAVINGS BEGIN TO APPEAR, BUT THEY ARE BY NO MEANS DRAMATIC UNTIL THE FIFTH YEAR AND LATER BECAUSE OF THE LAG BETWEEN BIRTH AND, FOR EXAMPLE, SCHOOL ATTENDANCE. THE

CHIEF OF STATE APPEARED INTERESTED IN THIS LINE OF ARGUMENTATION; APPARENTLY NO SUMMARY PRESENTATION IN QUANTIFIABLE TERMS  
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HAD PREVIOUSLY BEEN MADE TO HIM, SUGGESTING THAT WE SHOULD GIVE GREATER EMPHASIS TO THIS SUBJECT IN OUR CONVERSATIONS WITH KEY OFFICIALS. IT WILL BE IMPORTANT TO PROVIDE AS MUCH HELP AND SUPPORT ON THE DEMOGRAPHIC SIDE AS WE CAN TO BEGIN - AND I DO MEAN BEGIN - TO DEVELOP THE SENSITIVITIES ON WHICH TO ADVOCATE A MORE ACTIVE POPULATION PLANNING PROGRAM. SOME ACTION HAS ALREADY TAKEN PLACE, AND, MORE SHOULD BE DONE. IN THIS RESPECT I DO NOT THINK THAT DIRECT AND EXPLICIT BILATERAL POPULATION PROGRAM INVOLVEMENT, 'PER SE', EXCEPT IN DEMOGRAPHIC AND PERIPHERAL AREAS, CAN BE ANTICIPATED ANY TIME SOON. INDIRECT SUPPORT TO PROGRAMS IN HONDURAS WAS STEPPED UP LAST YEAR. THIS, TOGETHER WITH SOME ACTIVITIES INTEGRATED WITH OUR HEALTH ACTIVITIES, CONTINUE TO BE THE MOST PROMISING EFFECTIVE TRANSITIONAL STEPS; I.E., A TRANSITION LIKELY TO EXTEND SEVERAL YEARS. THE CHIEF OF STATE AND I AGREED TO GET TOGETHER FOR FURTHER CONVERSATIONS AFTER HE HAD HAD MORE TIME TO GET ADDITIONAL ADVICE AND DO MORE THINKING. HE OFFERED TO PROVIDE COPIES OF PAPERS DETAILING THE WORK THAT HAS BEEN ACCOMPLISHED ALONG THESE LINES, AND I READILY ACCEPTED HIS OFFER.

8. OUR CONVERSATION ON THE AGRICULTURAL AND FOOD PRODUCTION SIDE, WHILE ABBREVIATED, WAS ENCOURAGING. AID HAS COLLABORATED CLOSELY IN THIS FIELD WITH THE GOVERNMENT FOR SEVERAL YEARS. OVER THE PAST YEAR EVEN CLOSER WORKING RELATIONSHIPS ON THE ANALYTICAL SIDE HAVE BEEN DEVELOPED. POLICY ISSUES IDENTIFIED AND ANALYZED HAVE AND ARE BEING DISCUSSED BY THE ECONOMIC CABINET, WHERE POLICY DECISIONS WILL IN FACT BE MADE. THE AGRICULTURAL SECTOR IS BEING PULLED TOGETHER IN A MORE COORDINATED FASHION. THE NATIONAL DEVELOPMENT BANK, THE GOVERNMENT'S PRINCIPAL AGRICULTURAL LENDING INSTITUTION, IS BEING RESHAPED AND REORGANIZED. THE MEASURES TO STRENGTHEN THE BANK'S AGRICULTURAL CREDIT OPERATIONS WOULD BE STRENGTHENED, PARTICULARLY AT THE FIELD LEVEL WITH ESTABLISHMENT OF REGIONAL PLANNING AND SUPERVISORY UNITS. I NOTED THAT THIS STEP AND THE RECENT APPROVAL OF THE AGRICULTURAL MARKETING INSTITUTE ARE NEEDED AND WOULD BE BENEFICIAL. I ALSO NOTED WITH PLEASURE THAT THE GOVERNMENT THROUGH  
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THE MINISTRY OF NATURAL RESOURCES IS IN THE PROCESS OF FIXING CROP PRODUCTION TARGETS, FOR THE FIRST TIME, OVER A MULTI-YEAR PERIOD (1979-1983). THIS WILL MAKE PLANNING FOR THE AGRIC-

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ACTION OES-07

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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 3 OF 3 TEGUCIGALPA 2470

FOR: SECRETARY VANCE AND ADMINISTRATOR GILLIGAN FROM AMBASSADOR  
JARAMILLO

CULTURAL SECTOR MORE PRECISE AND MORE MEANINGFUL. IT WOULD BE POSSIBLE TO IDENTIFY BOTH PRODUCTION PROGRAMS AND TARGET GROUPS AND, AS HE KNOWS, WE ARE PARTICULARLY INTERESTED IN SEEING THAT OUR AID SUPPORTS HONDURAN PROGRAMS TO BENEFIT THE VERY POOR. THE ANALYTICAL ROLE OF THE USAID IN ALL OF THESE AGRICULTURAL POLICY DEVELOPMENT AREAS ACROSS THE BOARD HAS, OF COURSE, BEEN CENTRAL TO OUR DEVELOPMENT STRATEGY, PARTICULARLY IN THE PAST YEAR. THE CHIEF OF STATE'S COMMENTS INDICATED THAT OUR EFFORTS HAVE BEEN BOTH USEFUL AND APPRECIATED. HE DENOUNCED SPECULATION AND ILLICIT TRADING IN BASIC GRAINS, WHICH HE SAID KEPT PRICES HIGH AND SUPPLIES FOR DOMESTIC CONSUMERS LOW.

9. I EMPHASIZED PARTICULARLY THAT THE SETTING OF PRODUCTION GOALS COULD RESULT IN INCREASED PRODUCTION. REDUCED PRICES MIGHT WELL OCCUR WITH BENEFITS IN TERMS OF LOWER PRICES TO URBAN CONSUMERS AND AT THE SAME TIME PROVIDE A GREATER NET INCOME TO THE PRODUCERS. (MUCH, OF COURSE, DEPENDS ON PRICE ELASTICITIES.) I SAID IT SHOULD ALSO BE BORNE IN MIND, HOWEVER THAT MOST OF THE CAMPESINOS IN THE TRADITIONAL SECTOR ARE ALSO IN THE MARKET. IF THEY DO NOT HAVE ACCESS TO IMPROVED TECHNOLOGY THEY WILL GET LOWER PRICES FOR THEIR PRODUCE BUT THIS WILL NOT BE COMPENSATED FOR BY GREATER PRODUCTION. WE ARE CONCERNED AND WILL BE FORTHCOMING IN HELPING THE GOVERNMENT REACH THESE PEOPLE  
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WITH EFFECTIVE PROGRAMS BEFORE THEIR CONDITION - ALREADY AT THE SUBSISTENCE LEVEL - DEPRECIATES FURTHER. I TOLD THE CHIEF OF STATE ABOUT THE INTERMEDIATE TECHNOLOGY SEMINAR I HAD ATTENDED TEN DAYS AGO (JOINTLY SPONSORED BY THE USG/USAID AND MINISTRY OF NATURAL RESOURCES). I SAID THAT I HOPED A LOW-COST TECHNOLOGY/LOW-COST DELIVERY SYSTEM, ESSENTIAL CAMPESINO-BASED AND ORIENTED, MIGHT BE DEVELOPED TO HELP THIS PARTICULAR GROUP.

10. MY CONVERSATION WITH THE CHIEF OF STATE, WHICH LASTED MORE THAN AN HOUR, WAS THE MOST SUBSTANTIVE CONVERSATION WE HAVE YET HAD. MELGAR HAS THE REPUTATION OF LOOKING AT MOST ISSUES PRINCIPALLY, BUT NOT WHOLLY, IN POLITICAL TERMS AND IMPLICATIONS; BUT I SENSED THAT HIS INTEREST HORIZON IS EXPANDING BOTH IN SCOPE AND DEPTH. EMBASSY AND AID STAFF, PARTICULARLY THE LATTER, WILL BOTH HELP PREPARE AND FOLLOW THROUGH IN THIS CRITICALLY IMPORTANT AREA THROUGH THEIR NORMAL CONTACTS. WE HAVE, I THINK, A VERY FAVORABLE ENVIRONMENT IN THIS COUNTRY TO CARRY OUT AN ACTIVE DEVELOPMENTAL SUPPORT PROGRAM. I ANTICIPATE THAT A CAREFULLY CONCEIVED AND MANAGED EFFORT ON OUR SIDE WILL CONTINUE TO NET SIGNIFICANT RESULTS. WE WILL BE ABLE TO MAKE PROGRESS MORE RAPIDLY IN SOME AREAS THAN OTHERS. THIS IS TO BE EXPECTED, BUT WE MUST BE ALERT TO MAKE THE MOST OF OPPORTUNITIES PRESENTED - EVEN IN SUCH SENSITIVE AREAS AS POPULATION CONTROL. IN SOME SITUATIONS, IN ALL AREAS OF DEVELOPMENTAL COOPERATION, WE MUST RELY ON A COMBINATION OF DIRECT AND INDIRECT INITIATIVES AND EFFORTS DEPENDING ON WHICH, OR WHICH COMBINATION, IS LIKELY TO NET THE BEST RESULTS IN TERMS OF OUR OBJECTIVES AND INTERESTS. THE AID DEVELOPMENT ASSISTANCE PLAN AND THE ANNUAL BUDGET SUBMISSION - BOTH NOW IN PREPARATION FOR FORWARDING TO WASHINGTON - WILL PROVIDE ADDITIONAL SPECIFICS AND SUPPORTING INFORMATION.

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## Message Attributes

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